

will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later today.

# AMENDING TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE, TO EXTEND CERTAIN EXPIRING PROVISIONS OF LAW

Mr. BUYER. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6314) to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend certain expiring provisions of law and to expand eligibility for the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance program.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 6314

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

## SECTION 1. EXTENSION OF CERTAIN EXPIRING PROVISIONS OF LAW ADMINISTERED BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) AUTHORITY FOR HEALTH CARE FOR PARTICIPATION IN DOD CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WARFARE TESTING.—Section 1710(e)(3)(D) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “December 31, 2005” and inserting “December 31, 2007”.

(b) GRANT AND PER DIEM GRANT ASSISTANCE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS.—Section 2011(a)(2) of such title is amended by striking “September 30, 2005” and inserting “September 30, 2007”.

(c) TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION FOR SERIOUSLY MENTALLY ILL AND HOMELESS VETERANS.—Section 2031(b) of such title is amended by striking “December 31, 2006” and inserting “December 31, 2007”.

(d) ADDITIONAL SERVICES FOR HOMELESS AND SERIOUSLY MENTALLY ILL VETERANS.—Section 2033(d) of such title is amended by striking “December 31, 2006” and inserting “December 31, 2007”.

(e) ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON HOMELESS VETERANS.—Section 2066(d) of such title is amended by striking “December 31, 2006” and inserting “December 31, 2007”.

(f) GOVERNMENT MARKERS IN PRIVATE CEMETERIES.—Section 2306(d)(3) of such title is amended by striking “December 31, 2006” and inserting “December 31, 2007”.

(g) ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE ALLOWANCE FOR WORK-STUDY.—Section 3485(a)(4) of such title is amended in subparagraphs (A), (C), and (F) by striking “December 27, 2006” and inserting “June 30, 2007”.

## SEC. 2. EXPANSION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR SURVIVORS' AND DEPENDENTS' EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(a) EXPANSION OF ELIGIBILITY.—Section 3501(a)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking the period at the end of subparagraph (A) and inserting a semicolon;

(2) by striking the comma at the end of subparagraph (B) and inserting a semicolon;

(3) by striking “, or” at the end of subparagraph (C) and inserting a semicolon;

(4) by striking the comma at the end of subparagraph (D) and inserting “; or”;

(5) by inserting after subparagraph (D) the following new subparagraph:

“(E) the spouse or child of a person who at the time of application by such spouse or child for educational assistance under this chapter is a member of the Armed Forces

who, as determined by the Secretary, has a total disability permanent in nature incurred or aggravated in the active military, naval, or air service.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Such title is further amended—

(1) in section 3511—

(A) in subsection (a)(1)—

(i) by striking “Each eligible person” and inserting the following: “Each eligible person, whether made eligible by one or more of the provisions of section 3501(a)(1) of this title.”;

(ii) by striking “a period” and inserting “an aggregate period”; and

(iii) by striking the second sentence;

(B) in subsection (b)(3), by striking “section 3501(a)(1)(D)” and inserting “subparagraph (D) or (E) of section 3501(a)(1)”;

(C) in subsection (c), by striking “or 3501(a)(1)(D)(i)” and inserting “3501(a)(1)(D)(i), or 3501(a)(1)(E)”;

(2) in section 3512—

(A) in subsection (a), by striking “an eligible person (within the meaning of section 3501(a)(1)(A) of this title)” and inserting “an eligible person whose eligibility is based on the death or disability of a parent”;

(B) in subsection (b)—

(i) in paragraph (1)(A)—

(I) by inserting after “section 3501(a)(1) of this title” the following: “or a person made eligible by the disability of a spouse under section 3501(a)(1)(E) of this title”;

(II) by striking “or 3501(a)(1)(D)(ii) of this title” and inserting “3501(a)(1)(D)(ii), or 3501(a)(1)(E) of this title”;

(ii) in paragraph (1)(B), by adding at the end the following new clause:

“(iii) The date on which the Secretary notifies the member of the Armed Forces from whom eligibility is derived that the member has a total disability permanent in nature incurred or aggravated in the active military, naval, or air service.”; and

(iii) in paragraph (2), by striking “or (D) of this title” and inserting “(D), or (E) of this title”;

(3) in section 3540, by striking “and (D)” and inserting “(D), and (E)”;

(4) in section 3563, by striking “each eligible person defined in section 3501(a)(1)(A) of this title” and inserting the following: “each eligible person whose eligibility is based on the death or disability of a parent”;

(5) in section 3686(a)(1), by striking “or (D)” and inserting “(D), or (E)”;

(6) in section 5113(b)(3)(B), by striking “or (D)” and inserting “(D), or (E)”.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to a payment of educational assistance for a course of education pursued after the date of the enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Indiana.

Mr. BUYER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, today I rise and urge my colleagues to pass H.R. 6314, a bill that would extend several existing Department of Veterans Affairs benefits provisions.

This bill will extend these provisions of health care services to veterans exposed by chemical and biological testing under Projects 112 and SHAD, and treatment and rehabilitation programs for seriously mentally ill and homeless veterans until December 31, 2007. The

bill would also extend VA's homeless grant and per diem programs until September 30, 2007, and extend additional services for mentally ill and homeless veterans until December 31, 2007. It would extend VA's Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans, as well as the program which is providing government markers in private cemeteries until that date.

The work/study provisions of the legislation allowing veterans to assist VA and other government agencies would be extended until June 30, 2007. The work/study program is an increasingly popular benefit that provides veterans with an alternative use of their GI Bill if they choose not to go to college.

The bill also provides education benefits for the family members of severely injured veterans who are undergoing long-term convalescence while on active duty. Spouses and children of servicemembers who are determined by the VA to be permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected cause or causes would be eligible to receive Chapter 35 education benefits while the servicemember is still on active duty while undergoing treatment. This Chapter 35 provision would enable spouses and dependent children of severely wounded servicemembers to access their Dependents' Educational Assistance benefits while the servicemember is going through extended convalescence prior to discharge.

Under the current law, these beneficiaries must wait until the member is discharged, and since the spouses of these members most often become the primary breadwinner, I believe it is important to give them as much of a headstart as possible on becoming more competitive in the job market. The amount of the benefit remains the same.

I thank the Blinded Veterans Association for bringing this important issue to the attention of myself and members of the committee. We met with Army Sergeant 1st Class Jeffrey Mittman and his wife Christine. Sergeant 1st Class Mittman was blinded by an IED and is undergoing extensive rehabilitation and facial reconstruction.

Madam Speaker, this young soldier is articulate, has a very positive outlook on his life and is truly an inspiration. One look at his wife and you can immediately pick up the burdens she is bearing in caring not only for her husband, but also for her children. His wife Christy is a model of the love and support that she is providing to her husband as they face these challenges together. In fact, I think of this as the Christine Mittman provision, a provision not only that would help Christy, but also other spouses lessen the financial stress.

So, in essence, while Christy is providing leadership and mentoring for her children, caring for her husband instead of waiting until he completes all of the facial reconstruction and rehabilitation necessary, she can start her educational opportunities now.

I think this is the right thing to do. We all know he is going to be 100 percent disabled. She wants to become a nurse, so let's give her and others who are likewise situated to have these opportunities.

Madam Speaker, the committee is currently also undergoing bipartisan negotiations on a number of bills, not only with my House counterparts, but also with the Senate counterparts.

Among these bills are H.R. 3082, the Veterans Small Business and Memorial Affairs Act of 2006. It passed the House on July 24, 2006. We have informally been discussing provisions since July 28. The bill improves the status of veterans and disabled veterans small businesses when competing for contracts with the Department of Veterans Affairs. It allows Tribal government to participate in the VA's State Cemetery Grants Programs, authorizes the VA Secretary to provide the family of a veteran interred in a private cemetery with government markers, which we are doing now. It also requires the Veterans Employment Training Service, otherwise known as VETS, to establish nonmandatory guidelines for disabled veterans outreach programs. There are a lot of things in this bill, and I am hopeful we are going to get this done and negotiated.

There is another bill, H.R. 4061, the Department of Veterans Affairs Information Technology Management Improvement Act. It would centralize VA's IT organizational structure so that it reports directly to the Department's chief information officer.

Ultimately, the bill would empower the CIO with the authority over the IT budgets, equipment and personnel. While the House passed this bill with widespread bipartisan support, and I appreciate the leadership of Mr. FILNER and others on this legislation, the Senate is even yet to take action on that bill.

There is another bill, H.R. 5815, the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Authorization Act of 2006, that would ensure that we will efficiently provide the right facilities with the right places for veterans' health care. Given the current veteran population and those which we can expect in the coming years, it would authorize \$2.5 billion for major implementation projects and \$51 million for facilities leases. This is an important bill, and we are getting close on these negotiations.

We have another bill, H.R. 5835, the Veterans Identity and Credit Security Act, as amended. This bill requires notification to Congress and individuals in the event of a data breach. All of us Members understand and remember the data breach.

□ 1130

And we had extensive oversight on the committee. Mr. FILNER and I were able to lead over eight hearings in a 6-week time frame, and we are perfecting change in our cooperation with the ad-

ministration. This is a good bill and I am hopeful that we can get this bill done.

This bill also included a scholarship and loan repayment program to provide the Secretary with a recruitment and retention tool to attract qualified people in the areas of information technology and management so they can work in these security areas. As I said, this bill received widespread bipartisan support here in the House and I am most hopeful that we can move to the Senate and achieve our work.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I am also pleased to rise in support of H.R. 6314, which would, as we have heard, extend expired and expiring authorization for the Department of Veterans' Affairs and expand eligibility for survivor and dependent educational assistance.

I want to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER), the chairman of our committee, and my other colleagues for working together on this very important legislation. I also would like to remind us all of the work of Ranking Member LANE EVANS. His integrity, leadership, and advocacy for veterans will be missed as we move into the next session of Congress.

This bill extends important authorities for the Department of Veterans Affairs to take care of our veterans. From 1962 through 1973, the Department of Defense conducted biological and chemical warfare tests on active duty servicemembers. These tests were known as Project 112 and Project SHAD. The Department of Defense has acknowledged that it did not keep patient care records to archive health effects of the tests nor did they get, I am sure, informed consent on these tests.

Just recently, in 2003, in response to concerns from veterans that their illnesses may be a result of these exposures, Congress did act. We authorized the VA to provide priority care to veterans who participated in these tests and did not require them to provide medical evidence that any of the illnesses are attributable to the testing.

This legislation before us today does the right thing for these veterans. It would extend the VA's authority to provide priority care for them through the end of next year.

I am disappointed that we have not extended VA's authority to give priority care to veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. Just like those veterans who were subject to Project 112 and Project SHAD tests, veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and probably got cancers and other maladies as a result deserve priority care, which may be a result of this exposure. They have provided service to the Nation. They were not given full information. They deserve our help and care today.

The administration has requested that we extend VA's authority with re-

spect to veterans exposed to Agent Orange, and I will work certainly in the next Congress to pass that extension.

The bill today also helps the over 200,000 male and female veterans who each night are sleeping in a doorway, under a bridge, in an alley, a box, a barn, a car, or a homeless shelter. Through a network of local nonprofit or public agencies, VA's grant and per diem program for homeless veterans offers homeless veterans a safe haven that is free of drugs and alcohol.

Last year roughly 300 programs across the Nation were able to give 14,000 homeless vets the help they needed to recover, rehabilitate, and obtain the skills necessary to reintegrate back into society. This legislation means that the VA can continue to support these hundreds of community shelters. But let me remind us all, as I will continue to do next year, that this covers barely 5 percent of the homeless veterans. We owe as a Nation help and care to the almost 200,000 others that remain on the streets tonight.

This bill extends the authority to treat seriously mentally ill and homeless veterans. More than one out of three veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who have turned to the VA for health care has received an initial diagnosis for a mental health disorder. Many more have such a disorder but did not come to the VA. Many did not check the boxes that would indicate this because they just want to get home to their families. We have a lot of work to do in this country to help those with mental health disorders.

This bill, though, will ensure that the VA has the authority it needs to provide our recent veterans, as well as veterans from previous conflicts, with this mental health care that they need.

As the chairman said, this legislation also extends certain work study opportunities for veterans who are students through June of 2007. Helping veterans who are attending college or vocational training to earn while they learn makes good sense. This bill will allow veterans who are students to receive work study allowances for working at VA hospitals and domiciliaries, at State veterans homes, and at national and State veterans cemeteries. While I am disappointed that we could not extend authority for this program beyond next June, I am glad that this legislation will allow veterans who are participating in this program to continue through the end of their academic year.

A small number of permanently and totally disabled servicemembers are kept on active duty status to help them recover and rehabilitate from their injuries. When these servicemembers are discharged, their spouses and dependent children are then eligible for VA's educational assistance program. This bill, though, accelerates eligibility in cases where a disability rating of permanent and total disability is delayed because the servicemember has not officially yet been discharged from

military service. I am proud and I am grateful that this legislation will help families of these very severely wounded veterans by providing early education benefits.

I appreciate the chairman's enumerating other bills that need to pass through the Senate. As he said, a lot of good things are waiting. And this is one of them. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 6314.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BUYER. Madam Speaker, I thank my good friend Mr. FILNER for his comments.

You are absolutely right. We have a lot of good work product that hopefully we can get done.

At this point I would like to yield 2 minutes to a friend of America's veterans, the Honorable MICHAEL BILIRAKIS. MICHAEL will be retiring and leaving us here at the end of this Congress, and his work and leadership will be missed.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BUYER. I yield to the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I don't know if this is the last statement that Mr. BILIRAKIS will make on the floor, but I just want to say how much we all appreciate your work. We are looking forward to another Bilirakis joining us. But your advocacy on areas such as no offsets between pension and disability that we call concurrent receipt, you kept that issue alive and made sure that we would do justice. So we want to thank you for that. And we want to thank you for the civility that you have exhibited through your whole career and especially on this committee, which sometimes especially this gentleman needed.

So we hope that you have a good retirement, Mr. BILIRAKIS. We will be missing you, but we really appreciate your service to this committee and to this Nation.

Mr. BUYER. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman. We will have one more opportunity, I am hopeful, to speak about Mr. BILIRAKIS' efforts.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I thank you, BOB, for those kind comments and also the chairman.

I do rise in support of H.R. 6314, introduced by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs chairman, STEVE BUYER.

For the past 24 years, Madam Speaker, I have had the pleasure of serving in this body and also the honor, true honor, of being a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. During that service I have helped create and advance numerous programs that benefit our Nation's veterans. This Congress, as chairman of the committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, I have monitored and scrutinized billions of dollars of programs and projects that benefit veterans.

Today I stand before you and ask that we extend expiring provisions of

current law that provide health care, housing, educational, and other assistance that help veterans and their families. By supporting H.R. 6314, we will ensure the continuation of many of the programs and benefits that our Nation's veterans have earned.

H.R. 6314 is an important bill that is truly worthy of our full support. I urge my colleagues to continue meeting our obligations to our Nation's defenders by approving this measure.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD).

Mr. MICHAUD. Madam Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman for his time. I also want to thank Mr. BILIRAKIS for his time here working in a strong bipartisan manner on veterans issues.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 6314. I commend the chairman of the committee, STEVE BUYER, for his work on this legislation. This bill does deserve bipartisan support.

As a member of this committee and as citizens, we are united in our dedication to address the needs of veterans and their families. Ensuring that the Department of Veterans Affairs has the authority and resources to provide veterans with the medical care and benefits they have earned is a mission that we will continue in the next Congress.

H.R. 6314 is an important bill with a number of must-pass provisions. This legislation improves transition assistance for severely disabled service personnel. It is important that we do all we can to help the individuals and their families to regain their independence and economic security. This legislation also puts VA's specialized programs for homeless veterans on a more secure footing.

I am proud that this Congress is acting to extend the soon-to-expire authorization of VA's grant and per diem program for homeless veterans. I am glad that we are extending the authorization for VA's treatment of severely mentally ill veterans. By acting to reauthorize these fundamental VA programs, we give veterans and their families hope for recovery and having a better life.

Extending the authorization for these programs until the end of 2007 is an important first step, but it is not enough. In our great Nation, it is unacceptable that even one veteran should be homeless or go hungry. I am shocked that last year the VA's health care program for homeless veterans served nearly 600 veterans who returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. It is troubling that more than one in three returning veterans who come home to the VA for medical care has received an initial diagnosis for a mental health disorder. Homeless veterans and those with psychological wounds should not be left behind. They have served our Nation and deserve a rich and full life. In this Congress I introduced legislation to improve VA's capacity to help homeless veterans recover, rehabili-

tate, and return to a full life in our society. I plan to reintroduce my bill in the next Congress to help homeless veterans. We must keep the faith that we can end homelessness among veterans.

This September, the Health Care Subcommittee heard about how posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries are emerging concerns for veterans from the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. I support H.R. 6314 because it helps keep our promise to veterans with these injuries. The Committee on Veterans' Affairs and this Congress must continue to address veterans' mental health care needs in the future. Next Congress I plan to reintroduce an updated version of Ranking Member LANE EVANS' comprehensive bill on mental health. LANE EVANS has been a great leader and mentor. His legacy is measured in the millions of veterans and their families who have benefited from his determination to fight for the needs of veterans. I will deeply miss him and so will this institution.

I also want to thank Chairman BROWN for his work in a bipartisan manner on issues dealing with veterans affairs. I enjoyed his service and will look forward to working with him in the upcoming Congress.

Madam Speaker, this is a good bill. I want to thank Mr. FILNER for his leadership on this legislation as well.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 6314.

Mr. BUYER. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from the First District of South Carolina, the chairman of the Health Subcommittee, HENRY BROWN.

Mr. BROWN of South Carolina. Madam Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding this time.

Let me begin by thanking our esteemed committee chairman, Mr. BUYER, for his hard work in this Congress. Under his leadership this committee has fought to do what is right for veterans. And I would like to also extend my thanks to Mr. MICHAUD, what a great gentleman, the ranking member of the Health Subcommittee. It has been a real pleasure in working with him.

And, Mr. FILNER, we certainly appreciate your leadership on this committee. It has been great working in a nonpartisan fashion. We have always said when you come into that committee room, veterans is a nonpartisan issue, and it is great working in a nonpartisan fashion. I look forward to next year.

I especially want to applaud Chairman BUYER's willingness and attempts to look outside the box and push forward new and innovative initiatives to keep pace with the emerging health care needs of those who have faithfully served this country. The chairman has championed opportunities to improve the quality of the care delivered to our veterans through collaborative partnerships.

Collaboration is becoming increasingly essential in delivering health care across the Nation.

□ 1145

So long as we remain true to the distinct identity of the VA, and so long as we ensure the continued quality associated with VA care, VA collaboration on joint ventures with extensive medical university affiliations and the Department of Defense can be mutually advantageous for all organizations.

I am hopeful that the diligent and bipartisan work of the committee and its jurisdiction over VA construction matters will carry into the next Congress. The bill we are considering today will extend certain expiring provisions of law administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The legislation includes provisions to extend the authority for the grant and per diem assistance programs for homeless veterans and programs for the treatment and rehabilitation for seriously mentally ill and homeless veterans.

The VA is the Nation's largest single provider for integrated and specialized services for homeless veterans. On behalf of the homeless veterans who need and depend on the services in achieving successful outcomes, it is our duty to assure that the continuity of these services is not interrupted.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this legislation.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. BERKLEY), who is a staunch advocate for the veterans throughout her State, and who is the ranking Democratic member of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs.

Ms. BERKLEY. Madam Speaker, before I begin my remarks, I also would like to thank Chairman BUYER, Ranking Member EVANS, who we will miss very much, and Acting Ranking Member FILNER for moving forward on this bill.

I am supporting this legislation, but I feel that I need to make note of the fact that several of the provisions important to our veterans and their families have already expired. This should not have been allowed to happen.

In addition, there are other provisions that will expire before the end of the year. I want to particularly mention a provision in this legislation which extends through December 31, 2007, the Department of Veterans Affairs authority to provide a grave marker or headstone when a veteran is buried in a marked grave.

Veterans who served our country honorably should not lose their eligibility for recognition in death merely because the grave in which they are buried has a nonmilitary marker. I have a long record of interest in providing the burial benefits provided to our Nation's veterans, and this provision is truly a step in the right direction. We ought to make it permanent.

I joined Chairman MILLER in introducing legislation to extend this authorization. Although the VA and Members on both sides of the aisle supported making the authorization permanent, the committee was not able to fund the cost of a permanent authorization. I hope that we will be able to do so in the next Congress.

Eligibility for a headstone or a marker should not depend on whether a VA marker is provided before or after the placement of a private marker. As I stated, I am supporting this legislation, but I must make note that there are a number of other matters which should be acted on. I am especially disappointed that lease authorization for four clinics in Las Vegas on leases that will soon expire is not included, and it is going to have to be in order to provide health care to the veterans that live in southern Nevada.

Las Vegas' veterans are forced to rely on a string of clinics as the community awaits a new VA medical complex to be completed. It is at least 3 years out from being completed, even though we did break ground in October, which is a step in the right direction.

I have got 80-year-old veterans standing in 110-degree temperature going from clinic to clinic in order to get their health care needs met. That is why we are getting a full-service VA medical complex. But the fact is we need four leases approved by the end of the year. I hope we are going to do that before we recess for the year.

As I stated, Madam Speaker, I do support this legislation. I urge all of my colleagues to support it.

Mr. BUYER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Ms. BERKLEY, I want to thank you for your leadership on this bill. Thank you for working with NANCY JOHNSON, JEB BRADLEY. This symbol of honor and remembrance is very important. I want to thank you for that.

Also I want to embrace your words regarding the leases. In the construction bill we have a number of leases, and we need to complete our work. And so I embrace your words. I call on you for your help. The Senate has not been as helpful. You know that is a continuous body over there. We do not know how it is about to be reorganized. We have a lot of our work that needs to be done over the last 2 years, and we cannot let this construction bill die on the vine. We have to complete that work.

If we do not re-up these leases, it is going to cost the Federal Government more money because there are penalty clauses that will go into effect, and we cannot and should not let that happen.

Ms. BERKLEY. Madam Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BUYER. I yield to the gentlewoman from Nevada.

Ms. BERKLEY. Well, I want to thank you, Chairman BUYER, thank you for coming to Las Vegas and feeling my pain by the end of the day and appreciating how seriously impacted my veterans are.

I can assure you that I will do everything I can to urge the other body to move in an expeditious way, because you are quite right, we cannot let these leases expire. Thank you very much for your support.

Mr. BUYER. Reclaiming my time, I thank the gentlewoman for her leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE).

Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida. Mr. Speaker, as vice chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, I rise with very mixed emotion. I am certainly happy that Chairman BUYER is bringing this important bill to the floor that will extend several worthy veterans programs and add a new provision that will improve education opportunities for the spouses and dependents of our severely wounded veterans.

I urge my colleagues to support the bill in a bipartisan manner. However, I am disappointed that to date negotiations with the other body on Chairman BUYER's package of veterans initiatives, which was very, very bipartisan, has produced only limited progress. And there is a real possibility that many good provisions passed by both the House and the other body might not become law.

These bills include improvements to VA medical care, hospital construction and maintenance projects and a wide range of veterans benefits. From my subcommittee's perspective, important improvements include small business and employment legislation that is widely supported by the administration and the veterans community.

For example, our legislation will improve the competitive status of veterans and disabled veteran-owned small businesses seeking to win VA contracts. As the Members know, Public Law 106-50 and Executive Order 13360 direct Federal agencies and departments to award at least 3 percent of Federal contracts to service-disabled veteran-owned businesses, service-connected veteran-owned businesses.

To date the only department to make that goal was the Department of State in fiscal year 2004. This is an unacceptable record for a nation whose armed forces are engaged in hostilities as we speak. One of our bills, H.R. 3082, will help rectify that shortfall in at least the Veterans Administration Department.

The small business provisions of H.R. 3082 would provide VA acquisition staff additional tools that would give veterans and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses priority in many VA contract competitions.

The bill would also ensure that surviving spouses who retain control of those businesses after the veteran owner dies continue to enjoy status as a service-disabled veteran-owned business for up to 10 years.

In short, at least at the VA, the veteran business owners will be treated

fairly and enable the VA to set a standard for other Federal agencies. Mr. Speaker, the bill also makes several other improvements to the employment programs operated through the veterans employment and training service at the Department of Labor.

I am especially pleased that H.R. 3082 includes provisions of a bill I introduced to improve licensing and credentialing of veterans based on skills and experience they gained during their military service.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, this is an excellent bill. We need to pass it and make sure that the Senate gets the message loud and clear.

Mr. BUYER. I thank the gentlewoman for her contribution.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania, the Honorable TIM MURPHY.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill the House is now considering to extend a lot of critical services to veterans. I really on behalf of veterans am grateful for the work you have done on this.

Because of this type of bill, it cannot be amended, I would like to bring to your attention an issue that, Mr. Chairman, you and I have discussed, that we all remain very concerned about. That is the security breaches of veterans' personal records.

And if we are not able to pass a bill at this time, perhaps in the coming weeks or at least next year, we really need to be dealing with some of the issues, such as on November 2, a laptop containing 1,600 veterans records was stolen from a Manhattan hospital.

In August a desktop computer was stolen that had 38,000 veterans records, that had detailed records from the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia hospital areas.

Back in May we knew about another laptop computer that contained the personal records of 26 million veterans. I had introduced a bill, H.R. 6109, the Stop Endangering the Records of Veterans Act, or the SERV Act, in September which would require the VA to encrypt all data. I am pleased they are doing that now.

But we also need to have some teeth in this and make sure that those who do not properly protect veterans records, that there are penalties for them, criminal penalties if need be, if through their neglect or carelessness or direct action they cause a veteran's records to be stolen and cause harm from identity theft and just the problems that go with having medical records released.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased that you are so concerned about these veterans issues. I don't know if there is time left in this session to deal with these issues. But I hope we can at the very least take this up in the next session. Veterans know that you, Mr. Chairman, have worked so diligently to protect them on so many issues. I look forward to continuing to work with

you on these issues, that we can work for our veterans' safety and peace of mind in the future.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers. I thank the chairman for bringing us this legislation of must-pass authorizations and extensions, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of our time.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. FILNER for his cooperation on this bill and other bills. Mr. FILNER, we have got the CIO bill, we have got the cyber security bill. The Senate sent us two health bills, a benefit bill and we have got the construction bill. So all of these are in negotiation with the Senate. It is hard work. It represents 2 years of effort.

Recalling the recent words of my esteemed colleague, NANCY PELOSI, with the creation of this new theme of a bipartisan way for all Americans, let's embrace it. Let's get our work done. We enjoy bipartisanship on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I wish other committees could see how well we have worked together over the years. I call on leadership of everyone here in the House in dealing with these bills here on veterans affairs to complete our work on behalf of our Nation's veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I also call upon the Senate leadership to finish our legislative negotiations. Let's complete our work. Let's not forget our veterans and their families. And, Mr. Speaker, I also call upon the leadership of the veterans service organizations and the military service associations to encourage the Senate leadership to finish our negotiations and again finish the work that we had started on behalf of this Nation's veterans and dependents.

These warriors fought for our freedom. The least we can do is complete our work and provide for them the best care and benefits possible. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for bringing this bill to the floor today.

Included in H.R. 6314 is a provision to extend, through December 31, 2007, a program that provides government markers for veterans who are buried in a private cemetery.

The current five-year authority, which was effective for deaths that occurred as of September 11, 2001, expires on December 31st of this year.

Prior to this authority, if a veteran was buried at a private cemetery and the family purchased a private headstone, the veteran was ineligible for a government marker.

I want to recognize Representative NANCY JOHNSON, who has been championing this cause for over 5 years.

I appreciate her working with my Subcommittee to ensure that veterans and their families continue to have access to symbolic expressions of remembrance.

Mr. Speaker, as the 109th Congress comes to an end, I want to recognize Representative JEB BRADLEY, the Vice Chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memo-

rial Affairs, and Ms. SHELLEY BERKLEY, the ranking member, for their active participation on the Subcommittee. We accomplished quite a bit over the past 2 years and I thank them both.

I also want to thank the Subcommittee staffs on both sides of the aisle—Paige McManus, Chris McNamee, and Mary Ellen McCarthy.

Finally, on behalf of the Subcommittee, I commend Chairman BUYER and Ranking Member EVANS for their bipartisan leadership of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the bill before us.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6314.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those voting have responded in the affirmative.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks relative to the bill which the House just considered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Indiana?

There was no objection.

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#### EXPRESSING SENSE OF HOUSE WITH RESPECT TO RAISING AWARENESS AND ENHANCING THE STATE OF COMPUTER SECURITY

Mr. INGLIS of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 993) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives with respect to raising awareness and enhancing the state of computer security in the United States, and supporting the goals and ideals of National Cyber Security Awareness Month.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 993

Whereas over 205,000,000 Americans use the Internet in the United States, including more than 84,000,000 home-users through broadband connections, to communicate with family and friends, manage their finances, pay their bills, improve their education, shop at home, and read about current events;

Whereas the approximately 26,000,000 small businesses in the United States, who represent 99.7 percent of all United States employers and employ 50 percent of the private